

## Book Reviews

### 'Vanished' Has Key Ingredients, Rates

**VANISHED.** By Fletcher Knebel. Doubleday. \$5.95.

IF ONE WERE TO CONCOCT a recipe for the modern, sophisticated suspense-thriller, he might use Fletcher Knebel's "Vanished" as an archetype. Not all would agree on ingredients or proportions, but the following should be included: a sympathetic character whose behavior is shrouded in mystery, giving some pause to the reader; the involvement of people in high places, such as Washington, in which someone's reputation or political status is threatened; sex-intrigue, creating if possible suspicions of deviation; a group of people who are "in," but who have a propensity for gossip, thus threatening enterprise; travel, particularly to exotic places; and an ambivalence in all characters so that the reader can never be sure who wears the black hats or who the white.

In "Vanished," a prominent Washington lawyer disappears from the fourth fairway of an elite golf club. At the same time a celebrated scientist-teacher vanishes, and it is rumored that both had spent evenings together in a disreputable hotel in Washington. Then another scientist, a Nobel-Prize winner, walks into oblivion while attending a top-level conference in Finland. The lawyer is a personal friend of the president of the United States, and although the president allows the FBI to begin investigation, he will not permit involvement of the CIA, even when it is discovered that all three missing persons have left the United States.

The president, coming up for re-election, stands firm in a policy of no comment and noninterference. Scandal begins to run rampant: The scientists have defected to Russia; the lawyer and teacher have been caught in an affair that will embarrass the president; a financial blunder of huge proportions is uncovered and those involved must remain in hiding until after the election. The press commences to publish

rumor as if it were truth; the president's adversary in the coming election has a heyday speculating on perversion, mismanagement and treason within the president's camp.

THE NOVEL IS PROJECTED into the near future, into a world where nuclear stockpiles grow at a shocking rate. Red China has been admitted to the United Nations but continues to pose a threat to world peace. Russia and the United States have drawn closer together. Great Britain is yet a nuclear power, but little else. France has developed her position of isolated confusion to an inordinate degree. The atomic scientists of the world are threatening a mass "walk-out." The United States has turned, through its CIA, to practices an open society must deplore; even the president is not immune to the prying eyes of the CIA—in fact, his political future is threatened by the very agencies he has fostered, or at least put up with.

At one point the president declares, "What is left of our open society if every man has to fear a secret government agent at his elbow? Who can respect us or believe us when some of our young scientists go abroad as the instruments of a hidden agency?"

### Good Suspense Thriller



FLETCHER KNEBEL

That Fletcher Knebel's final resolution to all problems raised in the novel is a bit extraordinary, and would seem to be based on 18th-century concepts of the perfectability of man, does not detract from the entertainment value that suspense thrillers provide. Knebel does not attempt to penetrate the gossip circles and corruption in Washington in the style of Gore Vidal, Irving Wallace or Allen Drury. Such a background, well known to the reader, is there, but Knebel concentrates his attention on the intrigue with thematic elements reserved for his incredible denouement.

The novel is written in a fast-paced, conversational style with point-of-view shifts made frequently to increase involvement and suspense.

"Vanished" provides no profound solutions to great world problems, but it is entertaining, suspenseful reading.

—J. D. HUTCHINSON